

Holistic tourism focus of plan to be world-class tourist spot

Open and green growth strategy will realize island's balanced development, **Ma Zhiping** reports.

Hainan, the country's youngest province, celebrates its 30th anniversary in April next year, and it is making big strides toward building a demonstration province for holistic tourism in the country, according to the Hainan provincial government.

For the first time, the development of holistic tourism was mentioned in the Government Work Report, which Premier Li Keqiang delivered to the country's top legislature earlier this month. Li said the government will continue to improve tourism facilities and services and work to develop rural tourism, recreational tourism, and holistic tourism in 2017.

Hainan province is among the first batch of holistic tourism development regions, and its five-year plan (2016-20) promotes the development of holistic tourism. According to the plan, Hainan will be basically able to serve as a demonstration province for holistic tourism in China by 2018.

Holistic tourism encourages people to consider the effects of tourism on the local economy, culture and environment.

Hainan's plan outlines how it will be made into a world-class island vacation destination that is open, green, and civilized, and which is ready to offer its experience in cultivating the holistic tourism industry to other parts of the country by 2020.

Hainan will push supply-side reform in the tourism sector to make full use of its ecological advantages, combining them with the successful experiences of other popular tourist destinations to upgrade the quality of tourism on the tropical island.

With detailed guidelines for each of its cities and counties, Hainan has established specific targets for the upgrading of 10 major tourist products, centering on sea, health, sports and cultural tourism, according to the plan.

Industrial convergence is encouraged in developing holistic tourism, with the main focuses being on the combination of tourism and agriculture, tourism and the internet and tourism and medical services.

To ensure the success of holistic tourism, Hainan will stress the introduction of international elements, standardization, information services and measures to protect the area's ecological, cultural and historical resources.

Song Ziqian, an expert with the China Tourism Research Institute, said: "Developing holistic tourism is an important step in transforming and upgrading the country's tourism industry. As for Hainan, which is developing as an international destination, holistic tourism is in line with its development mission and localized efforts are certain to enrich and support its attraction to both domestic and international visitors."

Five construction firms were each recently fined as much as 500,000 yuan (\$72,634) for discharging sewage into the Meishe River, which runs through the capital city of Haikou.

Qionghai, where Boao is located, has banned 70 illegal sand-extraction spots and destroyed 285 ships involved in the illegal trade on the Wanquanhe, the third-longest river in Hainan, nicknamed China's Amazon for its unique tropical rainforests.

Applauding these actions taken to protect local ecosystems, Luo Baoming, Party chief of Hainan province, said: "We must insist on these efforts and dissipate the fortunes of those who damage the island's ecosystems. We must strive to improve the local environment, we must not degrade it."



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Luo's remarks highlight the value of Hainan's environment and the province's determination to safeguard it as a sustainable lifeline for Hainan, which is home to more than 9 million people.

He pledged that Hainan will use all its strength to ensure the sustainability of its environment through legal means, integrated planning, special campaigns and new measures to help increase its green spaces and clean its rivers.

Steven Williams, a Canadian expert who has stayed in Shanghai for three years, was impressed by the area's beautiful scenery and the development of science and technology in Hainan during his first trip to the island.

"I noticed that Hainan struck a good balance between environmental protection and economic development by combining the two in an effective way. This is very important for Hainan's development," he said.

Mai Zhenghua, the top official of Lingshui Li autonomous county, which is located near Sanya and formerly dependent on

real estate for its economic development, said Lingshui is seeking new sources of growth, including tropical, high-efficiency agriculture.

The county is also promoting the convergence of local culture, sports and tourism and building a hot springs vacation zone and an international pelotherapy health resort, an attraction with high growth potential as people care more and more about their health.

Lingshui will adopt a "one town, one industry; one village, one product" holistic tourism policy. The practice will help cultivate the brands and produce of local farms, such as cherry tomatoes and mango fruits to help more people rise out of poverty.

As rural tourism gains momentum, some villages have established a business mode of "cooperatives-plus-rural, households-plus-leisure" tourism, which has empowered farmers' production and improved their earnings.

In 2016, the lives of people in 22,600 poverty-stricken villages were improved through

developing tourism. The nation plans to help 12 million people escape poverty by 2020 by involving them in holistic tourism.

The national strategy of building Hainan into an international tourist destination has put Hainan on the fast track since 2010, attracting investment in infrastructure — high-speed railways, hotels, high-end commercial real estate and tourism facilities — which have all improved the competitiveness of its tourism industry.

In 2001, Hainan received 11.24 million visitors. That figure rose to more than 60.23 million in 2016. Tourism revenue totaled 8.7 billion yuan in 2001 and the figure jumped to 66.9 billion yuan last year.

Hainan plans to launch 501 major projects in 2017, with total investment expected to reach 228.8 billion yuan. The projects cover tourism in coastal towns, rain forests, cultural experiences, beautiful villages, and parks with themes such as aerospace, film, the ocean and rain forests. More cooperation and investment is welcome,

according to the provincial government.

An 888-kilometer-long sightseeing expressway will connect all 18 cities and counties around the island, leading tourists to 100 towns to enjoy local traditional history and culture.

The new roads network follows the construction of a high-speed railway that loops the island, the first of its kind in the world, providing incomparable tropical landscapes since it opened in late 2015.

Yet Hainan's tourism industry still has room for improvement.

Wang Yong, a deputy to the Hainan provincial people's congress, said the variety and quality of tourism products, as well as shopping and entertainment facilities, need to be expanded, and more roads, farmers' homestays, communication, account setting, foreign-language services and other public conveniences are needed to help tourists enjoy new, holistic experiences.

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Yalongwan Tropical Forest Park in Sanya is a popular destination where visitors can venture for a look at an unfamiliar ecosystem.

New policies bring visitors into local villagers' lifestyle

By MA ZHIPING in Haikou

Efforts to develop holistic tourism in the country are underway and visitors to Hainan Island early last year were beginning to see and feel the emerging changes.

"We are impressed by the improvements in local tourism infrastructure and the charming towns on the island which are becoming our new favorite weekend destinations," said Zhang Guilin, a bank worker who spent last weekend digging for sweet potatoes in Ruixi town, a tourist attraction less than 30 kilometers away from Haikou, capital of Hainan province.

"Digging for sweet potatoes is a brand new experience for all of us, and working with farmers in the field is such a joy, especially for our kids," said Zhang. "The sweet potatoes taste delicious, like chestnuts, and are sold hot. We are happy to get them in the fields and happy to see farmers earning more here."

During the New Year holidays this year, villages in Lingshui Li autonomous county in eastern Hainan received more than 41,000 tourists, with about 28,000 staying for one night, bringing local farmers an income of more than 26 million yuan (\$3.77 million), according to the county tourism administration.

Village tourism, especially among those with unique ethnic cultural traditions or in areas of natural beauty, is becoming a new growth point for rural economies as holistic tourism gains momentum in Hainan.

Those living near the sea live off the sea, the old saying goes. But things are changing in Tanmen town of Qionghai, where local people have made their living through fishing in the South China Sea for a millennium, said a township official.

"The town's leadership have decided to take full advantage of its fishing facilities and sea resources to develop tourism in a bid to better protect the sea while sustaining growth in income for local fishermen," said the official.

Their new ideas are already taking shape. Some of the wooden fishing boats are being turned into restaurants or tea houses where tourists can see fishermen catching or unloading their daily harvests while enjoying local food and drink. Tourist fishing boats will also be introduced to bring tourists to see fishing demonstrations or even out to sea to experience fishing for themselves, according to the official.

Similar creative efforts are being made all over the island to promote holistic tourism and bring about the "Hainan dream" of local residents and increasing tourists coming from home and abroad.

Hainan Island is China's only tropical province designated by the central government to become a holistic tourism demonstration province.

The Boao Forum For Asia Annual Conference 2016 released a report on holistic tourism, called the Qionghai Consensus. It defines holistic tourism as a model that encourages people to consider the positive effects of tourism on the economy, society, culture and environmental development.

The model emphasizes the overall planning and strategic management of resources to promote industrial integration, so that tourists enjoy a better experience and local residents enjoy higher standards of living.

Last year, Hainan began to focus on building boutique tourist cities, provincial-level tourism industrial parks, specified zones for leisure and tourist attractions, as well as towns and villages and streets with historical and cultural value. Transportation and public service facilities have also been improved, according to the provincial tourism development commission.

Hainan Island, located at roughly the same latitude as Hawaii and encircled by 1,823 kilometers of charming coastline, is home to precious ecological resources, which were described by President Xi Jinping as invaluable assets that no one could buy or borrow.

The tropical island is considered to be one of the country's best places for both living and tourism, with a warm climate year-round, forests that cover more than 60 percent of its land area and a large number of aquatic farms that produce an impressive variety of sea products.

We are impressed by improvements in local tourism infrastructure and the charming towns on the island."

Zhang Guilin, a tourist visiting Ruixi town



A local family digs for sweet potatoes in Ruixi town on the weekend. The tourist attraction is less than 30 kilometers away from Haikou, capital of Hainan province.